

Movie Makers

July-August, 1999

Volume 9 No. 4

The American Motion Picture Society

Narration: A Voice is Heard

As the amateur film maker progresses beyond family record movies and becomes more skilled in the art, he must begin to think in terms of adding festival quality to his films. Current sophistication of amateur sound equipment makes it easy to add a new dimension of quality to his efforts.

The next step is to give more attention to narration to maintain a level of quality to match the other aspects of acoustic sophistication. A well planned narration can enhance even the finest movie, while a poor one will dilute its effectiveness. The narration performs several functions. The narration should set the tone of your film. The tone, (humorous, scholarly, professional, etc.) Determined by the content, can create totally different perceptions of the same material. Narration can add pertinent non-visual information to screen images, such as dates, names, or statistical data. It can also help to provide continuity in certain instances. Even a well planned film can have rough spots where narration can provide a smooth transition between scenes that could seem unrelated or out of sequence. I call this the "band-aid function." (Not desirable, but sometimes necessary.)

When giving your film its voice, a few rules should be kept in mind:

(A) Narration should be simple, brief, and to the point, blending with the picture and contributing to the overall impact. Words should not compete for attention with the visual flow of action.

(B) Narration should employ the use of the spoken, rather than the written word. A common weakness is the use of flowery or unrelated language reflecting a written, rather than the speaking vocabulary that sound natural. The emphasis should be on language that sound natural. In writing your script try to avoid words with the letters "P" and "S." When recorded, "P's" have a tendency to pop, and "S's" tend to hiss when spoken. Also, some words tend to slur rather than come out crisp and clear. To attain the most natural sound, tape record your narration and then play it back to see if it sounds as though you are speaking naturally, rather than reading it. If your tape recording has a number of popping "P's", hissing "S's" and words that are slurred, go over it and replace them with alternative words that do not have the offending characteristics.

(C) Narration should never be con-

strued to stand by itself. The film itself should be the dominant component with narration used only to increase the impact of the screen image. Always!... I say always!... Make sure your narration is related to what the audience is seeing on the screen. Seen quite often in amateur films, usually travel films, is the following scenario: On the screen are images of big trees and mountains of some national park, while the narrator is telling about wildlife that is found in the park. If you don't have footage of wildlife to match the narration, don't talk about wildlife. The poor shmoe in the audience is looking for a bear, but all he can see is trees. By pulling the viewer in two directions at once, the narrative and visual components tend to cancel each other.

One of my personal pet peeves, (try saying that without popping your "P's") common in amateur films, (and occasionally in professional films) is the use of a non-sentence or incomplete sentence to say something. This is usually most notable in travel films. For instance, there will be a scene of a river, or again it is our big trees and mountains. As the scene appears the voice-over says, "The Rhine River" or simply "Yosemite Park." And that's it! The viewer may want to know that it is the Rhine River or Yosemite Park, but with nothing more forthcoming from the nar-

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From the Editor

Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

**Vol. 9 July-August, 1999
No. 4**

MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of even-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$7.00, Canada \$9.00, foreign addresses \$10.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

**George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909- 1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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Address correspondence to the Society, 30 Kanan Rd. Oak Park, CA 91377-1105. E-mail: RGARRETSON1@JUNO.COM.

Officers of the Society: President, Ernest Smith, Salt Lake, Utah; vice President, open; Secretary/ Treasurer, Roger Garretson, Oak Park, California; Directors, Peter Crombie, Oak Lawn, Illinois, Jack Ruddell, Mississauga, Ontario.

SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES

CANADA, Margaret Chamberlain, 2701 Arbutus Rd, Victoria, BC V8N1W8.

UNITED KINGDOM, Terry Mendoza, P.O. Box 2009, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BF England

Page 5 contains a facsimile of an AMPS web page. Currently this page has a simple design. It shows who we are and talks a little about the festival. The page serves as an introduction. Along with the main page is a sample article page. I plan to house it as part of my web page and eventually try to have it be on its own. If there are any comments, please tell me now. Other wise I hope to have the page up and running this fall.

Production can be painful. Production can be stressful. And that is from a person who loves production!

This summer, I am offering a documentary course and now the students have entered the editing stage. It has been a great experience for them. Much of what we talk about in a class room setting is now being implemented.

As I watch my students produce the documentary, I can relate to the problems they have encountered. The students face a deadline of 24 hours from the moment I am writing this. Our state public broadcasting system will be reviewing the piece and the students need to finish it so the people there can have time to look it over. So the students are feeling the pressure of meeting the deadline as they are editing right now on a Sunday afternoon.

Here is a recap of some of the problems they faced throughout the production process. How many of us have found ourselves in similar circumstances when shooting?

- The interviewee is reluctant to answer questions.
- The dew light is on in the camera disabling the recording function.

- The new non-linear editor decides to give an error message at the crucial final edit and the entire computer locks up.
- Interviewees speaking to softly.
- Personnel can't agree on changes.
- Music is too loud as compared to voice over.
- Camera operator didn't leave the camera framed on the shot long enough.
- When shooting pictures, the camera operator's reflection is seen in the glass.
- Not enough B-roll to cover some of the narration.

Granted many of these problems are due to inexperience. Things that time, practice and more shooting will correct. However, I think we can all relate to the equipment problems. While the students expressed frustration at these problems, They are learning that no production runs smoothly. They are learning how to solve problems in order to complete the task at hand, on time and with in budget. They are learning how to diplomatically relate to interviewees and people outside of the production that provide necessary materials for the program.

The most common complaint I have heard is "There isn't enough time." That the course should run for 16 weeks instead of 8 weeks. I disagree saying that all they are feeling is the pinch of time. And that was a good thing. I expect the final product tomorrow and will then send it off. What if they don't finish on time? Good question and hopefully that won't happen.

Above all else and even with the problems, production should remain an enjoyable thing to do. If not, then the person needs to move on to something else. I'll let you know how it turns out.

Matt Jenkins

Audience Appeal

No 3 - November 1991

One of the facets of motion picture judging which many fans feel is not given sufficient consideration is audience appeal. Certainly the appeal a picture has to the audience is important, but how does a judge measure that appeal?

Those steadfast folk who insist audience appeal should be a definite factor in appraising the merits of a motion picture are often deeply confused when asked "What audience?"

They may reply "Any general audience." But there is no such thing as a "general" audience, if there ever was. People don't go to "a showing of a motion picture." They go to "a showing of a specific," or to showings of a specific kind of pictures. Any given picture will have varying degrees of appeal to the many different personalities in the audience. It will appeal to some persons far more than to others.

For an extreme example let's say you make a superb video on the subject of how to grow petunias. It is an excellent documentary. You show it to the little old ladies who are members of the Sunset Garden Club. Audience appeal? Definitely - 100%. The next day you show that very same video to the dock workers in the shipyard. Audience appeal? Zero. Now which audience appeal rating would you recommend as being correct for that picture?

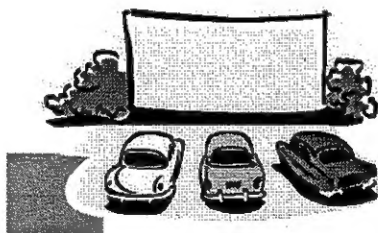
Does any judge dare assess a picture's appeal according to his own personal reaction to it? Can he honestly determine the appeal of any film when it is shown to a church group, a den of Cub Scouts, the eld-

erly at the Senior Center, the boys at the local pool hall?

Some people will call these extreme examples. Perhaps the last one is, the first three definitely are not. We have all shown pictures to these groups.

They say, take a picture most everyone will accept. What, pray tell, could that be? A general travel picture on Hawaii? Very well. In any audience there will be people who love Hawaii and the appeal is high. But there will be others in the audience who dislike the Islands, the heat, the humidity and will frown on the picture not matter how well it may have been made.

But suppose the picture is shown to a travel club. The appeal is high,



but so was the appeal on the petunia picture to the Garden Club. How can any judge decide which picture, before its own group, has the higher audience appeal?

Or, we show both the travel picture and the petunia picture to a meeting of the local PTA. Who in the world can assess the difference in the appeal of each picture, and by how much?

Those who are so strongly in favor of audience appeal being given major consideration in competitions must find practical answers to those questions. Until then let's evaluate any picture on how well the maker used the proper methods and techniques to achieve his objective.
George Cushman

(Continued from page 1)

rator, he immediately asks himself, "well what about the Rhine River or Yosemite Park?" Such procedure creates an awkward pause in the flow of the film. To maintain continuity, the minimum to be said here would be "this is the Rhine River," or "this is Yosemite Park." Minimal though it was, a complete sentence would not leave the viewer hanging out in space expecting more information. More fitting would be something like, "The Rhine River rises in Switzerland and flows through four other European countries on its way to empty into the North Sea." Or, "Yosemite National Park is famous for its giant redwood trees, and is the most popular park in California."

Another style of narration that really labels your effort as "bush league" is the subjective or "diary style." An example of this would be... "Mary Beth, my wife of thirty years, and I have always wanted to see this great land of ours, so in 1982, the year I retired, we got in our new Mercedes and set forth to see; the sights of America. It was a beautiful morning when we loaded our gear in the Benz and took off." This sounds quite flowery, but the audience really doesn't give two hoots in hell about your domestic situation or motivation. They just want to see those waterfalls, mountains and big trees, so give them a break and skip the personal stuff that really adds nothing to the film.

(D) Narration can be minimized when the film is fast moving and visually exciting. The pictures tell the story better. A number of my most popular films employ no narration at all....Remember, in the beginning, movies had no sound and those "old timers" did a pretty good job of letting the pictures tell the story.

Now to put all the foregoing verbiage in the proverbial nutshell:

(1) the narration is important to a film, but it should be subordinate to the image on the screen.

(Continued on page 6)

Technical

Generation Loss - What is it? - How to minimize it.

When video makers talk about generation loss they are referring to the degradation of the visual image when a video tape is copied (dubbed.) The audio is also degraded but that is usually not noticeable and is therefore not a concern. But noticeable degradation of the visual image is objectionable since we try to record the best possible image with the equipment we have. We hope it will show, after editing and copying, as well as it was recorded. But of course it won't. This is due, not only to generation loss, but also due to the quality and often, poor adjustment, of the viewing monitor and especially video projectors.

Most of us have gained most of our editing experience with linear editing. Linear editing is done by running tape back and forth in a playback VCR (a camcorder also has a VCR function) and recording on another VCR only the parts we want to save in the sequence we want or sometimes inserting and recording.

In this kind of editing we try to produce the end product, the tape we are going to enter in a contest or give to someone, with the least degradation from the original. To add music, narration, titles and sometimes stills or other effects we make a **master edit**. This tape is now 2nd generation and sometimes 3rd because we want to add something without starting over. In any case 2nd or 3rd we don't want to give that away as it is our master so we make a 3rd or 4th generation copy for whoever gets one.

There are ways to avoid or minimize generation loss such as in camera-editing, difficult and seldom used, and

giving away the master edit, heaven forbid. Non-linear digital editing claims to avoid generation loss, more on that later, but that requires special computerized equipment.

Short of non-linear editing, the degradation per generation can be noticeably reduced by recording the best image quality. Just as Hi-8 or S-VHS has less generation loss than VHS; a digital image will have even less generation loss when it is copied to S-VHS or VHS.

What is it? How can we minimize it?

To answer these questions requires more space than these two pages so I refer you to an excellent article in the June, 1999 *Videomaker* magazine titled "Clean Copies One Generation to the Next," pages 87-93. This article by Jim Simpson explains in words pictures and diagrams what causes generation loss and how to minimize it.

At the meeting last month Howard Lockwood showed split image comparison between scenes shot with a single chip Hi-8 and a three chip digital camcorder. The image quality difference was apparent in both sharpness and color fidelity; but still the image was very good even though it was on VHS tape and 3rd generation. If the original or first generation recording had not been Hi-8 and digital it would not have held up as well.

The *Videomaker* article by Jim Simpson has a full page of color pictures showing an image of flowers taken with five different format camcorders and first fourth and seventh generation copies. The tape formats are VHS, S-VHS, 8mm, Hi-8 and DV (digital.)

Although the degradation is apparent in the pictures, it seems to me that it probably would show up more clearly on a monitor or projector screen. The magazine printing process itself blurs the difference

somewhat. For some future meeting I will prepare a similar comparison but using split images. In working with image enhancement features of my AV mixer or the Casablanca non-linear editor I often use split images to compare the results and select which effect to use.

One full page of the article is devoted to diagrams showing two types of poor and two types of good cabling. These diagrams and the discussion about cable and jack quality provide important guidance to help minimize generation loss. Such advice is, "don't daisy chain from one device to another," but send the signal directly to the recorder and send a separate signal to the monitor via an RF connection. I would recommend not using RF unless that is the only input your TV will accept. If you have a monitor type TV that means it will accept RCA connectors and an NTSC composite input. If you must use the RF connector it will have significant signal degradation but at least it is only for the preview. Also, I would recommend, contrary to figure 2b in the article, always having the preview monitor showing what is being recorded rather than that which is being played back. If you have two monitors, it is nice, but not necessary, to have both playback and record monitored.

The article also cautions against sending the signal through editing devices not required for the current job. Each device in the chain has some effect on the signal.

Digital's Dirty Secrets

The article has a sidebar that discusses, as I did in my May, 1998 article, some of the factors that cause a digital signal to have some degradation of the signal even though it is not called generation loss. These factors can and do add up but far more subtly than with an analog recording.

Jim Beach



To return to where
you were before,

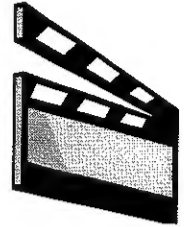


Movie Makers contains
articles of interest for
both the beginning and
advanced film/video
maker. Check out a sam-
ple article.

American Motion Picture Society

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker

The American Motion Picture Society (AMPS) was created to encourage and advance film and video production by serious movie and video makers. AMPS is the host of the American International Film and Video Festival, the oldest continuously run festival. This festival is held every fall and receives entries in a variety of formats from people living all over the world.



Members receive a bi-monthly newsletter containing articles regarding video and film production as well as a comprehensive festival listing. Members may also contribute articles to the newsletter.

It only costs \$7.00 per year to join and the member receives 6 issues of the *Movie Maker* newsletter.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 7.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 9.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$10.00

Enclosed _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS : _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park,
CA 91377-1105

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

To contact us

American Motion Picture Society
30 Kanan Road
Oak Park, California, 91377-1105

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Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address	Open to:	Subject	Formats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
7-24-99	PSA Int'l Video Festival %Bill Buchanan FPSA 19186 Kingsville, Detroit, MI 48225-2142	AD	G	M (NTSC)	n/a	\$8 \$12 w/ret	UV	N/A
8-1-99	Louisville Film & Video Festival 2337 Frankfort Ave Louisville KY 40208-2467	ABCD E	G	MNJ 35mm	NO LIMIT	\$35Feature \$25non feature	TV	11-3/7-99
8-15-99	70th Annual American Int'l Film & Video Festival % Roger Garrelson, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105	ABCD	G	HJMNOP MiniDV DVCAM	30 Min	\$10 \$8 -AMPS Member	UV	Oct 21-23 Salt Lake City, UT
9-10-99	Ten Best of the West Festival % Orin Furse, 704 W. 3100 South Bountiful, UT 84010	ABC Note 1	G	HJKMN OP MiniDV	20 MIN	\$10 for two entries	V	Oct 21-23 Salt Lake City UT
N/A Not Announced or Not Available Please include a self addressed stamped envelope with your entry request								
A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independant E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8	Q Invitatat'l R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	

Note 1 Entrants must live in AK,AR,AZ,CA,CO,HI,ID,IA,KS,LA,MN,MO,MT,NE,NV,NM,ND,OK,OR,SD,TX,UT,WA,WY, or in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba

VIDEO COMPETITIONS



I can tell you some sure ways to lose most movie competitions. We just finished Mississippi Valley '99. We watched the judges, and were involved in the score recording, and tabulation. I also had an opportunity to question some of the participants, and watched every show presented.

I can tell you that the quality of the shows presented is improving every year, yet no show approached the polish of a Hollywood presentation. Every show had good things as well as some problems. There were three areas that A SHOW PRODUCER should pay attention to.

For example there were 8 travel shows and 7 Documentaries. 63% of the Documentaries were in the top 3rd and only 38% of the Travel shows. Every one shooting a documentary had thought of a theme and shot to order. About half of the travel shows were done by taking the trip without a theme and editing what was obtained at the moment. All the scenarios were pre-planned and all accepted.

Rule 1: Don't pre-plan to reduce your chance.

Rule 2: Don't shoot at different angles, or distances. Every show that lost had no or few close ups, and did not vary the angle of the shot. It is easy to ruin a good story with poor shooting, or good shooting with a poor or non-existent story.

Rule 3: Poor post-production work can easily move a good story with adequate visuals down the ladder of acceptance. A. Poor graphics can hurt. B. Poor visuals will definitely be noticed and remembered longer than good work. C. Poor or inappropriate audio has ruined many a presentation. If it isn't good, get rid of it. At a certain point transitions help. Overdone or cute, they can detract from a show. If you don't know a reason for a transition, throw it in anyway. Even though you have an amateur show everybody has seen great work on TV. All the shows had some post production problems, and this was the second biggest area where work could be improved.

In summary, pre-production was the most ignored, production of visuals and audio's were the secondary area where advance thought could help. Editing experience will help the third area. The fact is the more you enter, the better you should become. If you know some of the pit falls it may help you avoid them.

Gerald W. Turk

(Continued from page 3)

- (2) the narration sets the tone of your film.
- (3) try to keep your wording simple and brief as possible.
- (4) it should explain but not expound.
- (5) The language should have the spoken rather than the written cadence.
- (6) Avoid certain sounds and words that create dissonance in your expression.
- (7) do not state the obvious.
- (8) The diary dissertation is deadly. (My...aren't we alliterative today?)

So... as you labor in the vineyards of creativity, craft a more polished narration on your next epic and present your audience with a fantastic movie instead of being satisfied to serve up one that is merely great.

Stan Whitsitt

